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THE FIRST PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON

Painted by Charles Willson Peale
at Mount Vernon May 1772
From the original
in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania
Presented by Charles J. Ogden
February 22nd 1892.

The First Portrait of Washington.

Presented
by
W. S. Baker
1722 Arch St.
Phila. Pa.

PRESENTATION

BY

MR. CHARLES S. OGDEN

TO THE

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

OF

CHARLES WILLSON PEALE'S ORIGINAL STUDY

FOR THE

FIRST PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON

WITH REMARKS

BY WILLIAM S. BAKER.

REPRINTED FROM

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THE FIRST PORTRAIT OF WASHINGTON,

PAINTED AT

MOUNT VERNON, MAY, 1772.

At a special meeting of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, held on Monday evening, 29th February, 1892, the original study for the first authentic portrait of Washington, a reproduction of which appears as a frontispiece, was presented to the Society by Mr. Charles S. Ogden, of Philadelphia. Mr. William S. Baker, on offering the resolution of thanks, said,—

"On the 21st day of May, 1772, nearly one hundred and twenty years ago, George Washington, of Mount Vernon, in the colony of Virginia, wrote as follows to Jonathan Boucher, an Episcopal clergyman at Hanover and St. Mary's parish: 'Inclination having yielded to importunity I am now contrary to all expectation under the hands of Mr. Peale; but in so grave so sullen a mood and now and then under the influence of Morpheus when some critical strokes are making that I fancy the skill of this gentleman's pencil will be put to it, in describing to the world what manner of man I am.'

"The Mr. Peale referred to was Charles Willson Peale, an honored name in the annals of American art, and the portrait of Washington which came from these sittings is the familiar three-quarter length, representing him at the age of forty in the costume of a colonel of the Virginia militia, a blue coat faced with red, bright metal buttons, and a dark-red waistcoat. On his head is the hat usually called the Wolfe hat. It is always alluded to as the first

authentic portrait of Washington, and is known to us by a number of engravings and reproductions. After the death of Washington the picture came into the possession of his adopted son, George Washington Parke Custis, of Arlington House, Virginia, and from him descended to his daughter, Mrs. Robert E. Lee. It is now in the possession of a member of that family.

"The sittings for this portrait were recorded by Washington on the blank pages of an interleaved almanac for the year 1772:

"'*May* 20.—I sat to have my picture drawn.

"'*May* 21.—I sat again to take the drapery.

"'*May* 22.—Set for Mr. Peale to finish my face.'

"An entry in his account-book is still more pertinent to the subject:

"'*May* 30.—By Mr. Peale drawing my picture, £18.4.'

"The original study for this portrait (the head and shoulders only), and from which the three-quarter length just described was painted, was retained by Mr. Peale, and formed one of the interesting features of his gallery of Revolutionary heroes included in what was known as Peale's Museum, at Philadelphia.

"At the time of the sale and dispersion of the Peale Gallery, October, 1854, twenty-seven years after the death of the artist, the original study, the uniform having been changed to the Continental colors, was purchased by Mr. Charles S. Ogden, of this city, and has been in his possession from that time.

"The following letter from Rembrandt Peale, son of Charles Willson Peale, to Mr. Ogden, dated Philadelphia, September 18, 1858, forms part of the history of the picture, which is really the first authentic picture of Washington, antedating for a short time the production of the three-quarter length:

"'Dear Sir,—The portrait which you purchased from the Peale Gallery I distinctly remember from my youth and during all the changes in my father's gallery to be the portrait of Washington, painted by my father at Mount

Vernon in the year 1772. Washington was then a colonel in the Alexandria militia, and the picture in the Mount Vernon collection represents him in the English uniform, Blue and Red. I am under the impression that your picture was the first study for the large picture now at Arlington, which was finished at Mount Vernon, and that my father subsequently (during the war for Independence) changed the dress to the Continental costume, notwithstanding that in our catalogues of the Museum Gallery this portrait has always been called "Col. G. Washington."'

"This is the picture before us, and I now have the pleasure of reading a letter from Mr. Ogden in reference to it, which will not only explain itself, but furnish a source of much gratification to the members of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

"'COLONNADE HOTEL, February 22, 1892.

"'MR. FREDERICK D. STONE,

"'LIBRARIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNA.:

"'DEAR SIR,—I send for presentation to the Historical Society my portrait in oil of Washington, painted by Charles Willson Peale at Mount Vernon in the year 1772, the first portrait that was made of Washington, it being the original study for which the three-quarter length was made, known as the "Arlington picture."

"'Also a letter from Rembrandt Peale, a son of the artist, relative to the authenticity of the portrait.

"'Also a portrait in oil, by the same artist, of Bill Lee, familiarly known as "Billy," Washington's favorite military servant during the war for Independence.

"'These portraits were purchased by me at the public sale of the Peale Gallery in Philadelphia. The frames are the originals that surrounded them when upon exhibition in the Peale collection of pictures in the museum.

"'I am sincerely yours,

"'CHAS. S. OGDEN.'

"The portrait of 'Billy Lee' in its connection also has its interest. The date of its execution is not given. 'Billy,' as Mr. Ogden states, was the favorite military servant of Washington during the Revolutionary War. He survived his master, and under the provisions of his will was well cared for at Mount Vernon.

"In the history of American portraiture, this portrait of Washington, in consequence of its being the first authentic original, will always occupy a prominent position, and the members of the Society have good reason to congratulate themselves on its acquisition."

Mr. Baker then offered the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted:

"*Resolved*, That the thanks of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania be tendered to Mr. Charles S. Ogden, of Philadelphia, for his generous and thoughtful action in presenting to the Society the portrait of Washington, painted by Charles Willson Peale at Mount Vernon in 1772, the original study for the three-quarter length representing him in the costume of a Virginia colonel, and also for the portrait of 'Billy Lee,' the favorite military servant of Washington, by the same artist."

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